



Maricopa County

News Release

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COUNTY APPROVES PLAN TO CREATE AIR QUALITY DEPARTMENT

New Department to Focus on Regional Air Quality Issues

The Maricopa County Board of Supervisors today approved a plan to creating a new Air Quality Department.

The new department will focus exclusively on regional air quality issues.

County Administrator David Smith said, "By having a department dedicated to just the issue of air quality, the Board hopes to bring about the regional resources and behavioral changes needed in the community to reach attainment of national air quality standards in all respects."

The Air Quality Department will work with the EPA, the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality and other stakeholders to actively develop plans to improve the air quality of the region.

Maricopa County continues to be one of the fastest growing areas in the country with 3.5 million residents driving nearly 70 million miles a day.

In the year 2000, Maricopa County improved its dust control plan by adding new staff and increasing enforcement actions. The plan was expected to bring the area into compliance with the particulate standards by 2004. Four air monitoring stations are continuing to show occasional readings above the standard.

Particulates are small microscopic bits of dirt, dust, combustion particles and other matter that are generated by construction, travel, other activities and even wind in the desert environment. These can compromise human health and create the familiar "brown cloud" during the winter months during an air inversion.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has set a deadline of 2006 for the County to meet air particulate standards (PM-10). In addition, a new ozone standard went into effect this year.

Staff from the Maricopa County Environmental Services Air Quality Division will be shifted to the new Air Quality Department. The county will conduct a national search for a director for the new department. In the meantime, Joy Rich, the Maricopa County Chief Regional Development Services Officer will serve as interim director. Ms. Rich will develop a ninety-day business plan to begin the transition of the new department. The new department will have a staff of about 122 persons and an annual budget of about \$10-million.

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